

'No Doubt' Ray's Guilty, Probers Say

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WASHINGTON — The House Assassinations Committee has "overwhelming" evidence that James Earl Ray fired the shot that killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in 1968, according to two committee members.

Evidence collected by committee investigators during its 15-month probe, including 28 hours of intensive, taped

interviews with Ray, "leave no doubt" as to Ray's guilt, they said.

Ray, scheduled to appear before the committee next Wednesday, now claims he was an innocent "fall guy" of a conspiracy to carry out the assassination, despite originally pleading guilty to the crime and avoiding a possible death sentence.

The two committee members, who

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asked that their names not be revealed because of a panel agreement not to talk to reporters until the investigation is completed, said the panel also will attempt to show that an FBI campaign designed to discredit King helped create "a climate" of violence that made the murder possible.

Next week's hearings are intended to be devoted to Ray's role in the King killing, and the allegations about the FBI will be the subject of public hearings in November.

The committee members' comments came at the same time Rev. Jesse Jackson, a civil rights leader who was with King when the assassination took place, said he had "profound doubts" Ray was the trigger man.

Jackson met yesterday with Ray at Tennessee's Brushy Mountain State Prison where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence. Jackson emerged saying he believed Ray "was involved but was not alone. It may very well be that Mr. Ray was a diversion in a grander scheme," Jackson said.

Three days have been set aside for Ray's testimony.

But a committee source said Ray and Mark Lane, his attorney, may have changed their minds and that Ray may refuse to answer questions from the panel.

"What can we do if he doesn't want to

talk? Threaten him with jail?" asked the source.

If Ray refuses to testify, the committee will retaliate by releasing convincing information — some in his own words — that he killed King, the source said.

"James Earl Ray talked to us for over 28 hours on tape. We have those transcripts . . . If he isn't going to testify, we'll release them," the source said.

Members of the committee who have read the transcripts and seen other evidence said flatly the committee can prove Ray killed King.

"When we get done, the American people will have no doubt that Ray pulled the trigger," said one committee member.

"But we are going to be able to show that a five-year program of harassment, surveillance and dirty tricks ordered by (FBI Director) J. Edgar Hoover orchestrated a climate in which the murder was inevitable," said the committee member who has been actively involved in the King side of the panel's work.